

Oregon High Desert Discovery



Oregon High Desert Discovery: An Overview



What Is It?

An Interagency Plan to Serve the Public

In order to most effectively and efficiently serve visitors in this region, the BLM and FWS have developed the Oregon High Desert Discovery to link five areas: Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Steens Mountain, Diamond Craters Outstanding Natural Area, Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge, and Warner Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The plan has been designed to guide, inform, and provide services for visitors in this remote region of southeastern Oregon.

How Was It Developed?

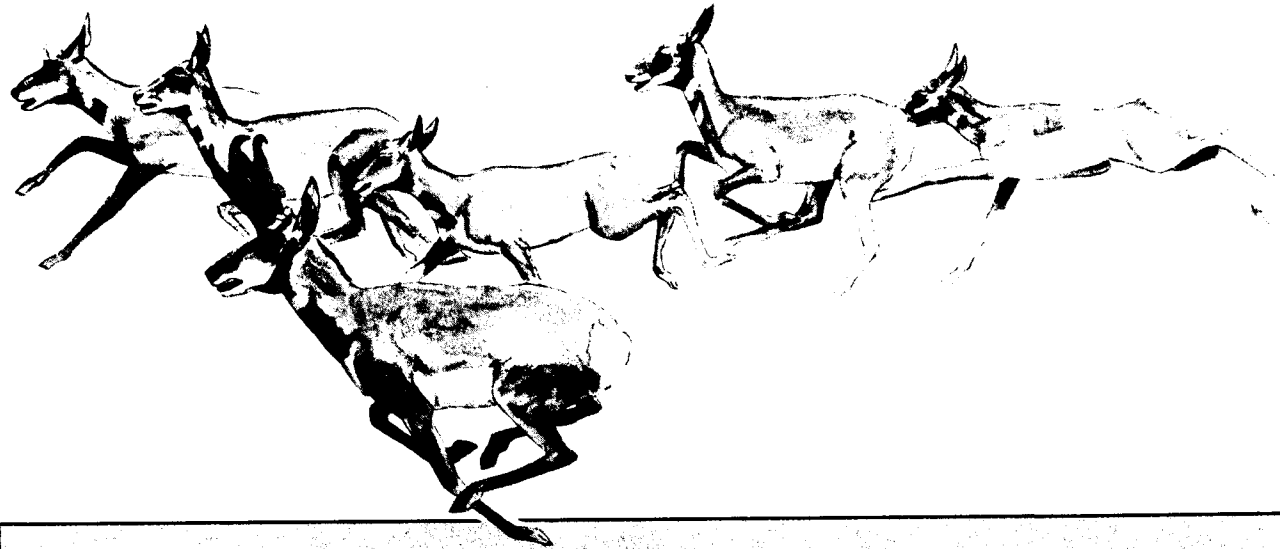
By Building on Past Plans

The conceptual plans outlined here were built on existing planning documents for all five areas. All proposed development has been publicly reviewed throughout the planning process. Public support and input, both past and present, have helped shape this plan.

What Is Included in the Plan?

The conceptual plan includes the following:

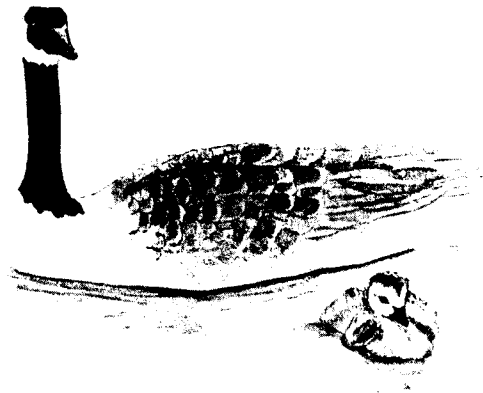
- Two information exhibits (one each in Burns and Lakeview).
- Two welcome and orientation wayside exhibits
- Three interpretive centers with the main focus of exhibits on the following subjects:
 1. **Malheur NWR:** Great Basin high desert wetland habitats; and prehistoric use of the resources.
 2. **Frenchglen:** Steens Mountain geologic and biologic uniqueness within the Great Basin high desert; and present and historic use of the resources.
 3. **Hart Mountain/Warner Wetlands:** high desert upland and riparian habitats; and survival and adaptation to wet-dry cycle wetland habitats.
- Eighteen interpretive wayside sites.
- Two interpretive trails.
- Campgrounds (one new, one upgraded).



How Will this Plan Better Serve the Public and Protect the Resources?

This plan will:

1. Provide the public with the facilities, services, and information necessary for a safe, enjoyable, and informative visit.
2. Ensure barrier-free access to all facilities.
3. Incorporate cost-effective, low-maintenance facilities that complement both the landscape and existing structures.
4. Minimize new development by enhancing areas traditionally used by the public.
5. Develop sites which protect the resources.
6. Develop provocative interpretive exhibits which identify and tell the stories of major natural and cultural resources, and foster awareness of major resource issues, including multiple-use management.
7. Coordinate interpretation to avoid duplicating topics, yet provide a broad overview and geographic orientation in key places to serve visitors who see only part of the Oregon High Desert Discovery area.
8. Provide maps and information outside of all interpretive centers, 24 hours-a day, showing: weather and road conditions; availability of gas, food, and lodging; recreational opportunities, etc.
9. Supplement the Oregon High Desert Discovery sites with an auto tour booklet and leaflets about specific areas or subjects.
10. Have the flexibility to tie in with current and future visitor and educational facilities in Burns and Lakeview.



Who Will Benefit?

Everyone from Visitors . . .

The Oregon High Desert Discovery has been designed to provide visitors the services, facilities and information they need for a safe, enjoyable, and informative trip. In addition, the public will be presented with a broad spectrum of the natural and cultural resources of these areas, and how they are all interwoven. For example, visitors can learn that snowmelt from Steens Mountain is the main source of water for the wetlands of Malheur NWR, and that for centuries, wildlife and humans have relied upon both mountain and marsh for survival. This offers people an important glimpse of the interrelatedness of the natural environment, man, and wildlife. When presented with a provocative, integrated story of the area as a whole, visitors will be able to develop a much broader understanding and deeper appreciation of the resources.

to Local Communities . . .

Better services and information may entice tourists to stay longer in the area and help diversify the local economy, which is currently based on ranching and timber.

to Students, Young and Old . . .

Kindergartners to elderhostel participants, who come to the area to study everything from wildlife to geology, will

have the use of classrooms, lab space, computers, and audio-visual equipment.

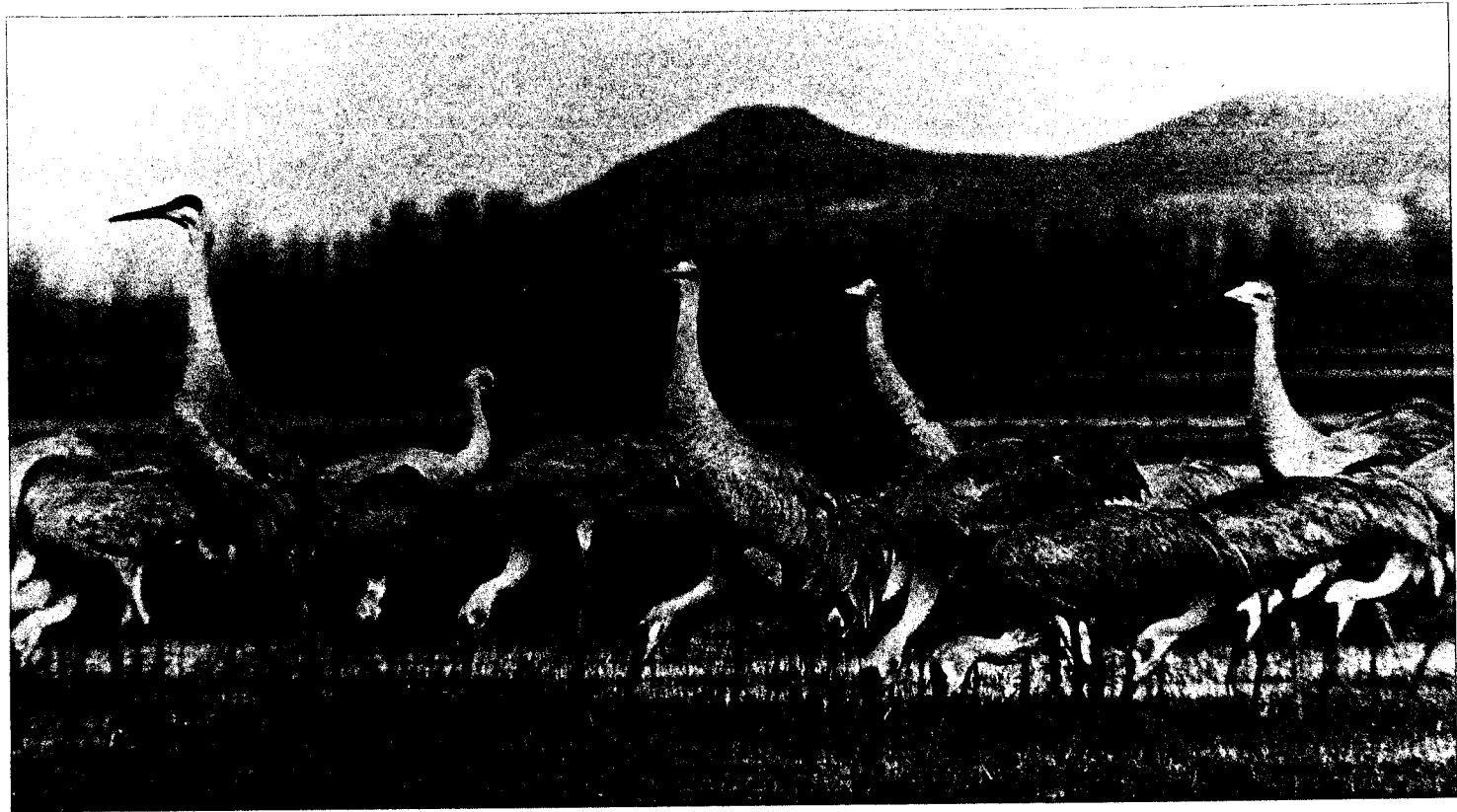
to the Agencies . . .

By sharing expertise, administrative space, and resources, two agencies can serve the public more efficiently and effectively while working to protect our natural and cultural heritage.

to the Resources . . .

The resources will ultimately benefit. The conceptual plan focuses visitors' use on less sensitive areas, so nesting wildlife, fragile features, and ecosystems will remain undisturbed. Through provocative interpretation, issues which affect the area's resources will be presented with different, broader, even global, perspectives. Exhibits will offer visitors a glimpse of worlds which may be seasonal, difficult to see, or more far-reaching than expected. Through enjoyment and understanding of these "hidden" worlds, visitors can gain appreciation which may, in turn, promote protection.

Malheur: An Oasis in the Desert



One of the crown jewels of the National Wildlife Refuge System, Malheur NWR is famous for its tremendous diversity and spectacular concentrations of wildlife. Each year thousands of birds seek out the 120,000 acres of wetlands in this desert oasis. Boasting over 250 species of birds, from great egrets to golden eagles, snowy plovers to sandhill cranes; trumpeter swans, lazuli buntings, bobolinks, and 27 different species of waterfowl, Malheur is a mecca for birdwatchers and photographers.

For Native Americans, fur trappers, homesteaders, and ranchers, Malheur's abundance was a magnet. The sheer numbers of swans, egrets, herons, and grebes also brought plume hunters, who nearly decimated those populations around the turn of the century. It was this demand which fueled the establishment of the refuge in 1908 to preserve and protect these species and their habitat.

Facilities Planned:

1. Interpretive center with observation deck, restrooms, and two meeting/classroom facilities.
2. Four interpretive wayside sites.
3. One interpretive trail (from P Ranch to Steens Mountain interagency interpretive center at Frenchglen).

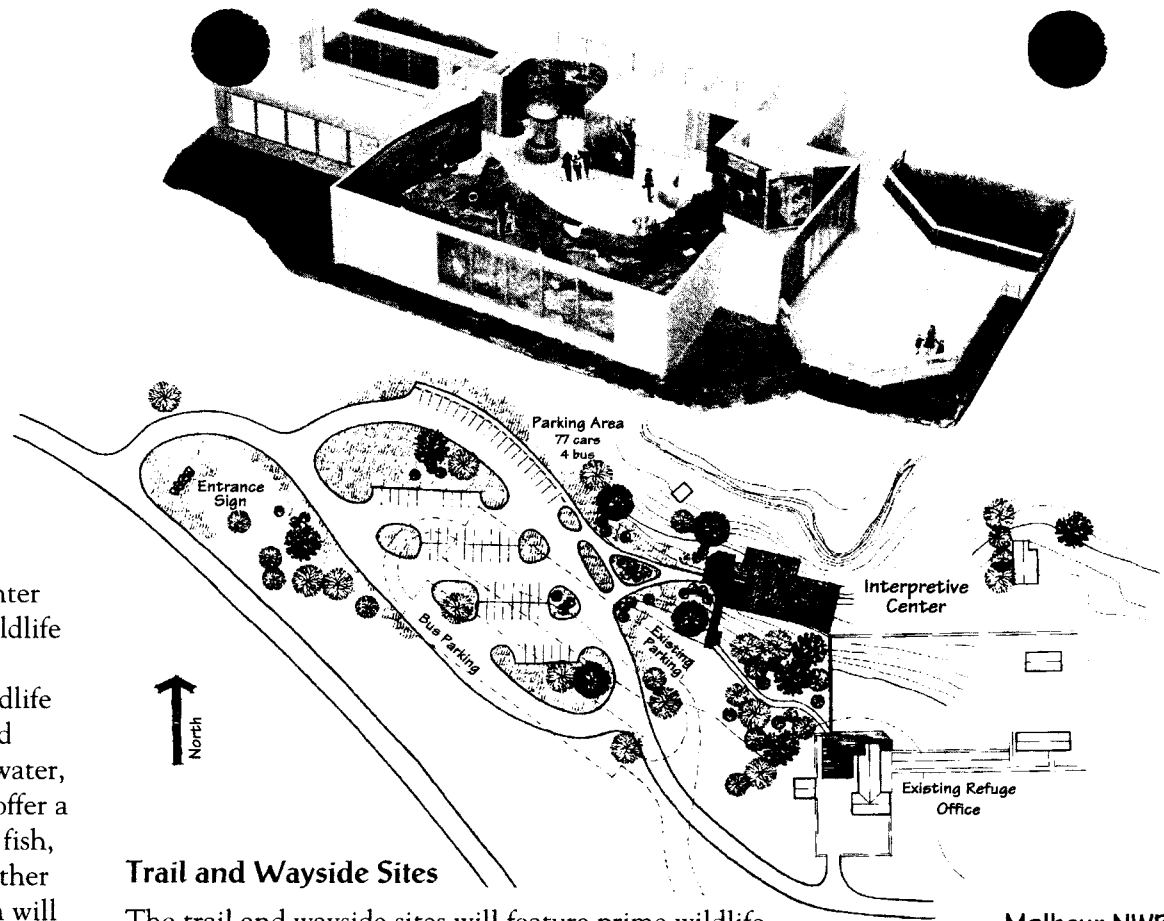
Interpretive Center

The exhibits at the Malheur NWR Interpretive Center will explore the importance of desert wetlands to wildlife and humans. The main feature will be an extensive diorama illustrating the diversity of habitats and wildlife at Malheur. Visitors will be able to walk through and explore various habitats, such as marshes and open water, which are relatively inaccessible. The diorama will offer a close-up look at a variety of plants, mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and insects, which normally are seen either from afar or not at all. An interactive video program will show birders the species found in the area, when and where to see them, a brief life history, and migration and habitat information.

The diorama will also trace the relationships between native inhabitants and the natural resources of the area for the past 5,000 years. Three recreated native dwellings, each furnished with tools and implements of daily life, will reflect each of the major shifts in technology and the availability and use of the natural resources. Adjacent to this will be an overview of non-native use of the resources, beginning in the mid 1800s and progressing through the contributions made by the Civilian Conservation Corps to the refuge from 1935 to 1942.

Trail and Wayside Sites

The trail and wayside sites will feature prime wildlife viewing spots, a sampling of habitats, and areas of cultural interest. Porcelain panels will be used to identify the most common species, their needs, and habitats. Topics and issues specific to each site will also be explored, such as why particular ponds are best for waterfowl broods; how and why management helps meet the demands of wildlife; habitat needs of neo-tropical birds; and how, through innovation and use of natural resources, Peter French built the largest single cattle ranch in the U.S. during the late 1800s. The trail will bring visitors through a variety of habitats to French's residential site to view some of the remaining structures, such as the long barn, the innovative willow corrals, and the beef wheel.



Malheur NWR
Interpretive Center
Site Plan

Steens Mountain: Rugged Beauty



Steens Mountain abruptly rises one vertical mile above the Alvord Desert, and stretches horizontally for 30 miles, offering majestic views of glacial canyons, hanging valleys, tranquil lakes, and alpine meadows. Locally called “the Steens”, its slopes are patterned by rolling sagebrush, gnarled juniper, and white-barked aspen. A Great Basin mountain “island”, Steens is a world all its own, a biologic crossroads harboring unique plant and wildlife communities. Rare alpine wildflowers cluster on high ridges as golden eagle and prairie falcon soar above.

The BLM managed areas of Steens Mountain offer hiking, fishing, hunting, birdwatching, and camping in a wilderness setting intermixed with rangeland. Long an attraction for homesteaders and ranchers, the mountain has numerous historic buildings which reveal dramatic stories of the struggles and hardships of rural living on arid lands. The Steens continues to attract those who cherish its sense of mystery and remoteness.



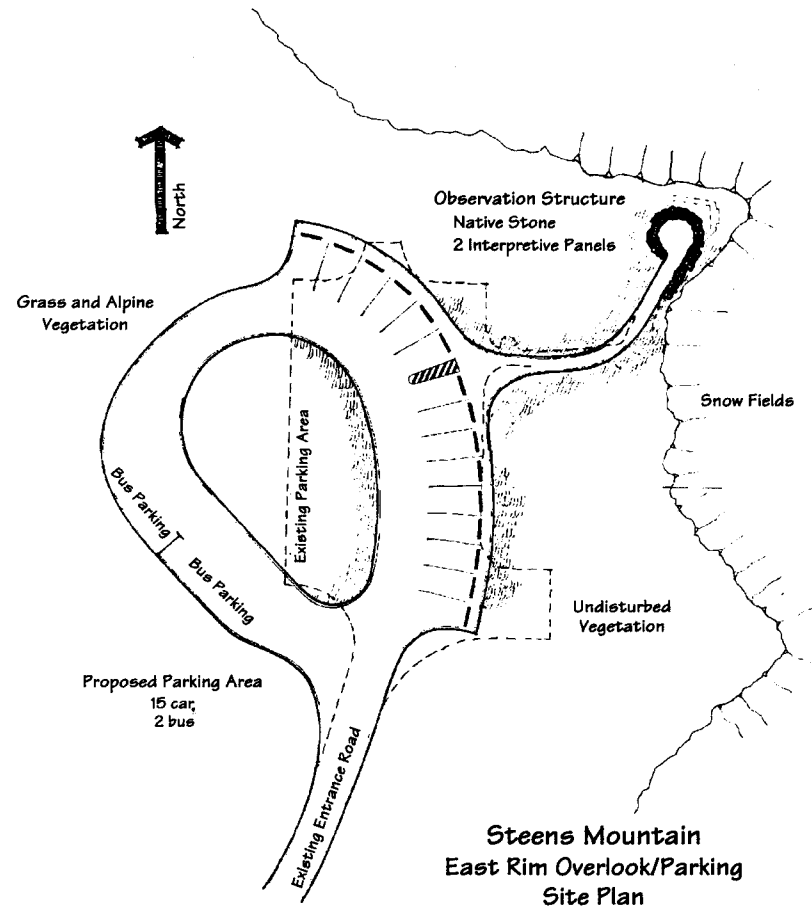
Facilities Planned:

1. Interagency interpretive center with restrooms and one classroom/meeting room.
2. Five interpretive wayside sites.
3. Orientation kiosks at three campgrounds.

Interagency Interpretive Center

The interagency interpretive center will serve as a focal point to introduce visitors to the striking world of contrasts found on the Steens. Introductory displays will offer information currently unavailable to most recreational users of this remote region. One major display will feature the vast array of plants and wildlife along the many levels of the ecological staircase which leads from the sagebrush of the Alvord playa to the alpine wildflowers atop the Steens. The stories of land use, including that of ranchers and homesteaders, will also illustrate how the mountain has helped shape the cultural patterns of people living within this arid landscape.

Groups ranging from elementary schools to hunters, and horsepackers to birdwatchers, will be able to attend guided presentations and audio-visual programs developed for their specific interest. An open-air rustic porch will offer magnificent views for those who wish to just sit and look out across the Blitzen Valley to the Steens.

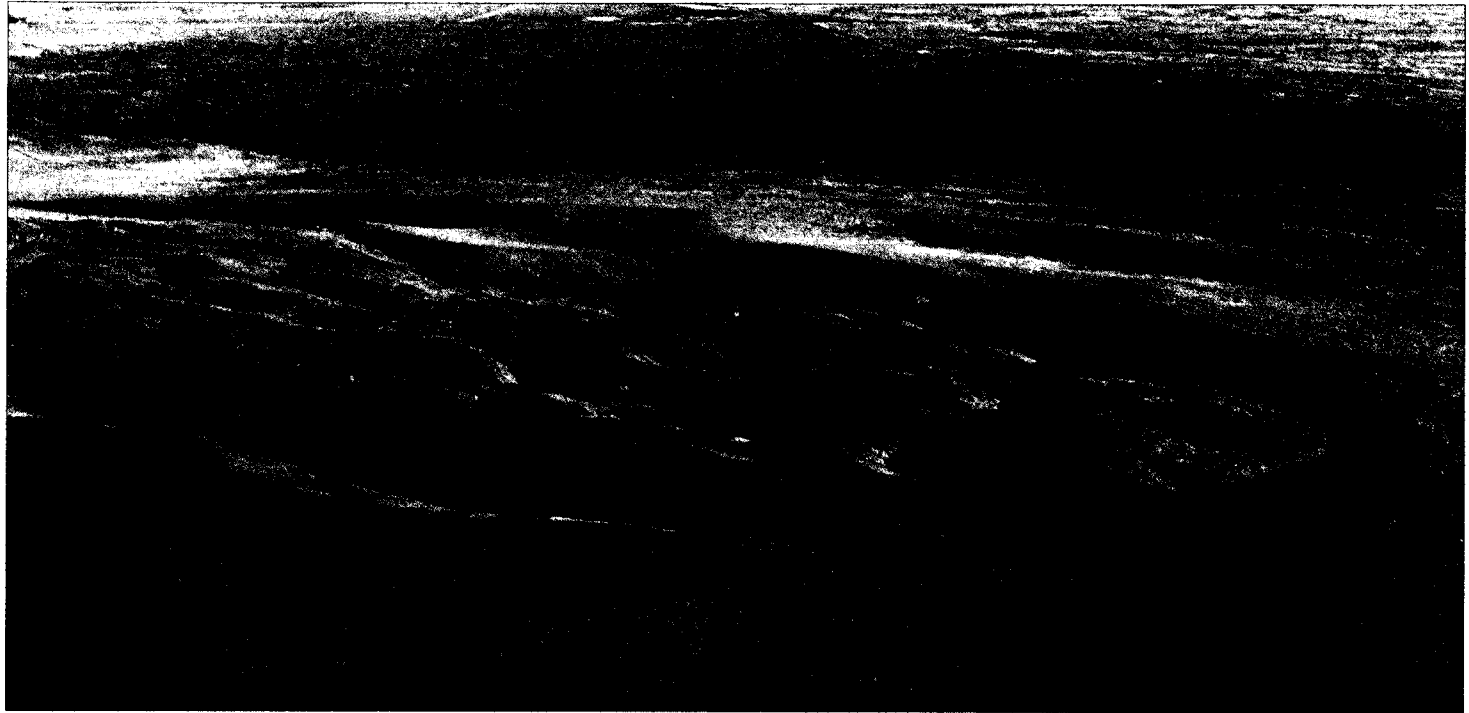


Wayside Sites

The wayside sites will offer interpretive signing at five popular overlook areas along the Steens Mountain Loop Road. Signs will highlight the mountain's important stories, such as: the glacial action that carved the beautiful hanging valleys, the uniqueness of the plant and wildlife communities, and the origins of the elusive wild horses. Identification of commonly seen species such as golden eagles, bighorn sheep, and alpine wildflowers will be highlighted throughout.



Diamond Craters: A Volcanic Wonder

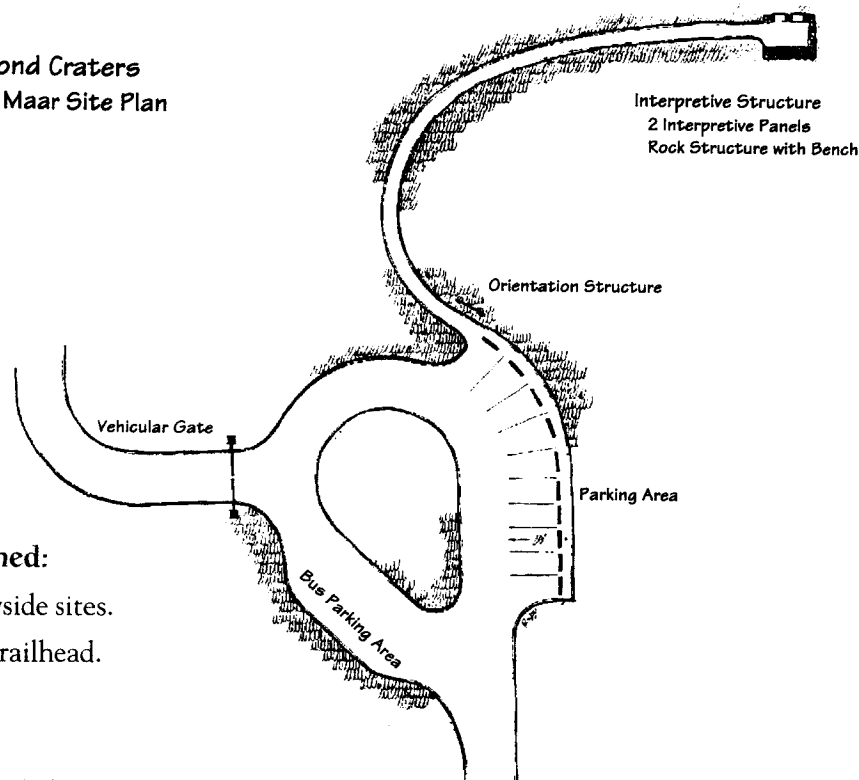


Acclaimed for its wide diversity of unusual volcanic features, Diamond Craters Outstanding Natural Area is a wonderland of domes, flows, craters, and spires. Formed by hot molten magma that spilled from cracks deep in the earth, the lava pancake known as Diamond Craters contains one of the greatest concentrations of volcanic features in North America. Magma and the resulting lava have created round lava bombs, cinder craters, mysterious drips, sculptured spires, grabens, and a water-filled explosion crater, Malheur Maar. A wealth of plants and wildlife have adapted to living within the volcanic features including bats, red-winged blackbirds, woodrats, numerous

reptiles, and insects. Research at the maar has revealed 7,000 years of pollen and plants in lake deposits, making it one of the most significant desert lakes between Mexico and Canada for its findings related to climate change.

Designated by BLM as an Outstanding Natural Area and an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Diamond Craters receives special management to protect these significant resources. Visited by scores of scientists and educators who enjoy and study the area, Diamond Craters offers important research, educational, and interpretive opportunities.

Diamond Craters Malheur Maar Site Plan



Facilities/Media Planned:

1. Two interpretive wayside sites.
2. Backcountry hiking trailhead.
3. Restrooms.
4. Auto tour leaflet.

The two wayside sites, each featuring scenic views of prominent features, will explore how lava has formed a diversity of volcanic features within Diamond Craters. Signs at Lava Pit Crater will orient visitors to the area using maps and an aerial view of Diamond Craters' "pancake" formation. Cored bombs, pahoehoe lava, aa lava, driplets, spatter cones, grabens, and maars will be described. The quiet eruptive formation of Lava Pit Crater will be brought to life with drawings and interpretation of lava lakes, benches, and flank flows. A second overlook at Malheur Maar will interpret the explosive formation of the lake and introduce the bats, ducks,

insects, and other wildlife that live within the area. A cross-section of a woodrat midden will offer stories of past climates gleaned from seeds, plants, and sediments, and pose questions related to contemporary climate change.

Trailhead signs will provide orientation to the rugged backcountry of Diamond Craters, along with resource and safety information. The auto tour leaflet will guide visitors and interpret the major features.

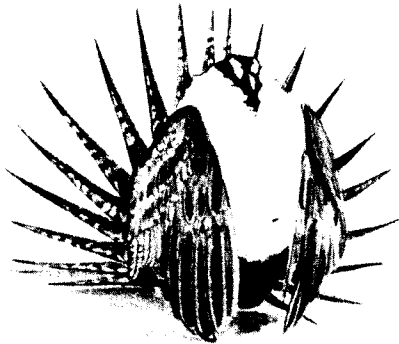


Hart Mountain: An Upland Paradise for Wildlife



Herds of pronghorn antelope race across its range, bighorn sheep meander along its cliffs, and sage grouse strut through its sagebrush expanses. In 1936, however, when the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge was established, pronghorn were nearly extinct, sage grouse were scarce, and bighorn sheep were gone from their ancient realms. Today, the refuge is a 275,000 acre haven for these species and a variety of others dependent on high desert habitats. With its superb uplands, a wealth of springs, and choice riparian corridors, Hart Mountain is rich in diversity and striking contrasts. A classic fault-block

mountain with its sheer western face and long, rolling eastern slope, Hart Mountain's steep canyons and rugged cliffs give way to gentle sagebrush-studded slopes and shallow lakes. This diversity draws a variety of wildlife from golden eagles, horned lizards, bobcats, and rattlesnakes; to pygmy owls, canyon wrens, migrating warblers, sparrows, and bats. Humans, too, from Native Americans, who made petroglyphs of bighorn sheep on the ridges thousands of years ago, to today's outdoor enthusiasts, are drawn to the wildlife and wildness of Hart Mountain.

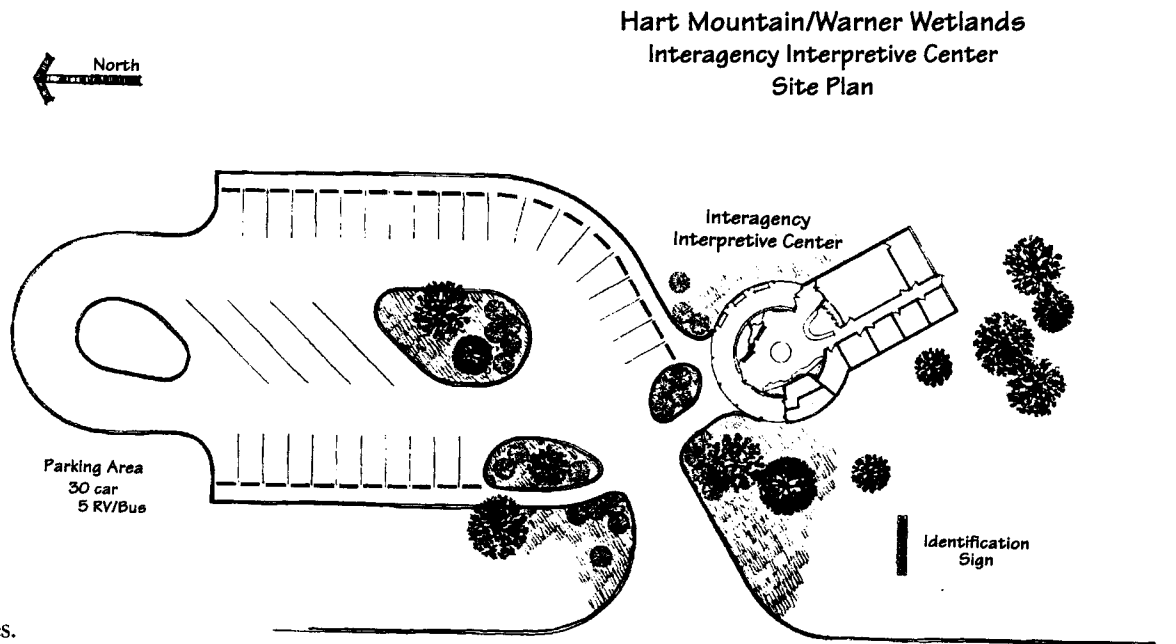


Facilities Planned:

1. Interagency interpretive center for Hart Mountain/Warner Wetlands with observation deck, spotting scopes, restrooms, classroom/meeting room, and offices.
2. Four interpretive wayside sites.
3. Upgrade one existing campground.

Interagency Interpretive Center:

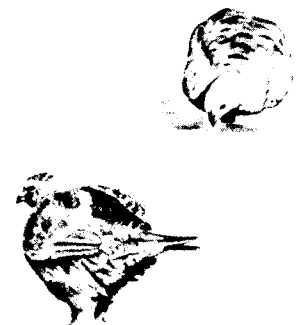
The interagency interpretive center will feature two main exhibits contrasting the upland habitats of Hart Mountain with the wet habitats of the Warner Wetlands. A diorama will focus on Hart Mountain's uplands and illustrate the crucial and fragile nature of riparian habitats in this arid terrain. Birds, plants, mammals, and amphibians will be featured, along with the unique traits and adaptations that enable them to survive in this severe environment. Interactive exhibits will look at changes in the climate, landforms, wildlife, and human use of the



area, from past to present, and examine trends for the future. Several of these exhibits will be able to incorporate on-going research on climate, geology, and archaeology.

Wayside Sites

Wayside sites at Hart Mountain will bring visitors to places of cultural interest and prime wildlife viewing spots. Interpretation will explore subjects such as the importance of sagebrush to sage grouse and other wildlife; the when, where, and why of pronghorn migration; how controlled burning helps wildlife; and how the Civilian Conservation Corps helped shape the refuge.



Warner Wetlands: A Wetlands Legacy



Nestled beneath the dramatic face of Hart Mountain is a chain of lakes known as the Warner Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern. This unique mosaic of sloughs, potholes, marshes, lakes, and meadows can fluctuate from 5,000 to 25,000 acres. Characterized by striking contrast, Warner Wetlands sparkle like a jeweled necklace in wet years, then in dry years reveal windswept rings of dune and silt. White-faced ibis, black tern, Virginia rail, long-billed curlew, sandhill crane, and numerous waterfowl funnel through the Warner Valley on their spring and fall migrations. Rock and lakeshore clues also

reveal traces of human use going back over 10,000 years.

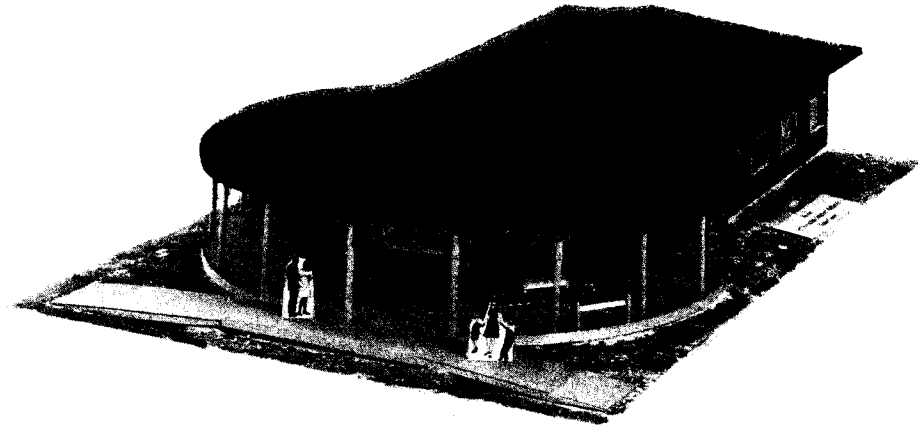
These fluctuating wetlands, with their sweeping curve of unique dune formations, have long been a special hide-away for birdwatchers, hikers, anglers, and hunters. An extensive network of trails throughout Warner Wetlands has been designed for visual, hearing, and mobility impaired audiences. Formally designated by BLM as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, the Warner Wetlands encompasses 51,000 acres.

Facilities Planned:

1. Interagency interpretive center for Hart Mountain/Warner Wetlands with observation deck, spotting scopes, restrooms, classroom/meeting room, and offices.
2. Three interpretive wayside sites.
3. One interpretive trail with restroom.
4. One campground.

Interagency Interpretive Center

In addition to the exhibits previously mentioned for Hart Mountain, this center will feature a major exhibit for Warner Wetlands which introduces the variety of wetland habitats, and explores the recurring wet-dry cycle which so drastically alters these bodies of water. Fish, birds, amphibians, insects, mammals, and plants that have adapted to survive through cycles of extreme change, will be featured. Another display will concentrate on the human response to these cycles, using archaeological evidence to illustrate 10,000 years of living on the land, spanning from prehistoric to historic times. Current archaeological research will be featured in an interchangeable interactive exhibit to show the role archaeology plays in preserving this rich heritage.



Wayside Sites

Interpretation will illustrate dramatic stories seen at the three wayside sites. One site will focus on the basin and range geologic story, a second will offer a dramatic bird's eye view of the Warner Wetlands that highlights the wet-dry cycle over thousands of years. The third will offer orientation to the wetlands and an interpretive trail, with disabled access, where visitors can observe wetland plants and wildlife such as waterfowl, deer, songbirds, cranes, and ibis.

Campgrounds

Camping facilities are greatly lacking in the Hart Mountain/Warner Wetlands vicinity. One new campground is proposed as part of this package. The site will accommodate both recreation vehicles and tents, have restrooms, and day-use fishing access.



How and When Will the Oregon High Desert Discovery Become a Reality?

Currently, both the BLM and FWS are implementing small pieces of this plan. At this point, because of the enormity of the project, there is no scheduled completion date. Both agencies hope to complete this plan within the decade in order to serve the public in the best manner possible. Timely completion will also ensure the integrity and design continuity of the plan, which will ultimately better serve the public, the communities, the agencies, and the resources. Although the Oregon High Desert Discovery is an ambitious undertaking, all parts of it, especially the buildings, are designed to be cost-effective.

Indeed, it may not take a decade to reach our goal.

The public comments received so far indicate strong support for the plan. Public/private partnerships or joint ventures may accelerate the completion of the project. In the meantime, both the BLM and FWS maintain their commitment to provide the best services for the public and the resources.



For more information about the
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